

**Testimony of the Stamford Youth Services Bureau
Before the Appropriations Secondary/Elementary Subcommittee
February 21, 2017**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Ranking Member Melissa Ziobron and Subcommittee Chairpersons Senator Slossberg, Senator Somers and Representative Rosario. My name is Terri Drew, and I am the Director of the Stamford Youth Services Bureau. I am here today to testify regarding the proposed new line item for both YSB grants and School Based Diversion Initiative Grant and also the proposed cuts.

The Youth Service Bureaus are mindful of our state's fiscal crisis, and very much appreciate all of your many hours of hard work to find workable and balanced solutions in the face of so many competing yet compelling interests.

There are currently 101 Youth Service Bureaus in Connecticut serving over 144 communities and the majority of YSBs are part of municipal government. It is imperative that funding to Youth Service Bureaus remain constant and that the competitive pool proposal not be approved by the state Legislature. YSBs already divert youth under 18 years of age from the Juvenile Justice System. With more "raise the age" legislation being discussed, the proposed closing of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School, and the elimination of Family with Service Needs referrals for truancy and defiance of school rules to juvenile court, YSBs will continue to play a key role in expanding and providing diversion programs to meet the needs of our most at-risk youth. The Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee is working very hard to reform CT's Juvenile Justice System and they are wisely focused on the YSB and JRB system as the vehicles of change for this reform. Additional support and resources will be needed at the local level and although there is no recommendation for new money to be allocated, there should be a discussion on repurposing or reallocation of existing funding to local communities for these programs.

Over the past 3 years Youth Service Bureaus have already sustained significant cuts resulting in a decrease in our ability to serve the youth and families of our communities, as we are required to do by state mandate. And now the potential for further cuts exists in the Governor's new proposed budget. In addition, despite these cuts, proposals continue to be made in the areas of Mental Health and Juvenile Justice which will place increased responsibility on local community supports such as Youth Service Bureau mental health programs and Restorative Justice Practices, all while reducing state funding rather than increasing it.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted,

Terri Drew, Director
Stamford Youth Services Bureau